

Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the National Committee for commemoration of 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda held under the Chairmanship of Hon'ble Prime Minister on 20th May 2010 at 5.00 PM at 7 Race Course Road, New Delhi

The list of the Members of the National Committee present in the meeting is at Annexure.

2.1 In his opening remarks, the Hon'ble Prime Minister and Chairman, National Committee, Dr. Manmohan Singh, recalled Swami Vivekananda as one of India's greatest spiritual leaders and described him as a revered figure in India's history and culture. The country should, he felt, work sincerely to celebrate the commemoration of his 150th Birth Anniversary in a befitting manner.

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

2.3 The Chairman further stated that the Commemoration of Swami Vivekananda's 150th Birth Anniversary would promote renewed interest, particularly among the youth, in his values, thoughts and ideals. In fact, Swami Vivekananda's birthday on 12th January is celebrated as 'National Youth Day' every year. On this day, his memorable call to "Work, work, work" is remembered.

2.4 Swami Vivekananda thought deeply about education and what it meant for Indian society. He conceived education as the primary means of rebuilding Indian society. For him, education meant secular learning that built character and instilled human values in students. The Chairman stated that the proposal received from the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission in Belur was based on this theme. It seeks to promote and implement Vivekananda's ideas on value based education. The education system should move beyond information provision to adequately emphasize on building core values. The need was to explore as to how some of Swami Vivekananda's ideas on education could be put into our school and college curricula.

2.5 The Chairman urged the Members of the Committee from different parts of the country to identify appropriate organizations at the local level, so that the government could support them to spread the message of Swami Vivekananda, far and wide.

2.6 The Chairman recalled Swami Vivekananda's extensive travels as a monk, covering the length and breadth of the country, and said that his period of meditation at Kanyakumari is immortalized by the famous rock named after him. But, as his travels in other parts of the country were less well known, attention was required to these to revive interest and for restoring some of the buildings or places which are associated with him.

2.7 The Chairman also stated that, to reach the youth, new media such as the internet was required. It is often said that much of the material on India, including on our historical figures such as Vivekananda, come from Western sources. If that is so, strenuous efforts need to be made to develop our own information sites, in a useful and attractive manner. High quality publications on Swami Vivekananda should be subsidized to make them affordable for our youth. Swami Vivekananda was one of India's earliest 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.

2.8 The Chairman recalled that Swami Vivekananda's famous lecture at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago on 11th September 1893 was a shining moment in India's cultural history. As the State of Chicago perhaps did not allow memorials of people who were not American citizens, we have to ponder on some other way of commemorating this event, at the place where it happened. The Indian American community could be urged to find creative ways of doing so.

2.9 The Chairman suggested the setting up of an Implementation Committee that could take on the task of examining, approving and better monitoring their implementation and report back, from time to time to the National Committee.

2.10 The Chairman sought the views of the Members on how best to organize the commemoration events, so that the National Committee could draw on the immense intellectual resources of its members to guide the celebrations.

3.1 On Chairman's request, Shri Jawahar Sircar, Secretary (Culture) and Member Secretary, National Committee, briefed the Committee about Agenda Item No.2, mentioning that the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission had submitted a proposal for programmes and activities, to begin in 2010-11 and spread over a period of 4 years. These are focused on youth and the details of the programmes were available in the Agenda.

3.2 PM and Chairman, thereafter, opened up the discussions on all the suggestions and proposals mentioned in the Agenda Notes together, and requested the members to contribute their suggestions. Dr. Karan Singh, President, ICCR observed that while preparatory activities, in case of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, for commemoration had begun one year in advance, in the case of Swami Vivekananda, these are being taken up three years before the actual event.

3.3 Smt. Sushma Swaraj, MP, Leader of Opposition, Lok Sabha suggested for recasting the 4-year proposal within a period of three years, so that it ends with the main Commemoration year, and does not spill over after that. Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Union Finance Minister also suggested for uniformity in approach in commemorating various events.

3.4 Secretary (Culture) clarified since some of the suggested proposals require a long preparatory period, it was appropriate that planning for the commemoration year 2013-14 (completion of 150 years) has begun now.

3.5 The Chairman, National Committee observed that it may be left to the Ramakrishna Mission to take up the activities as planned, for maximum effect and invited Swami Prabhananda to share his views and proposal with the National Committee.

4. Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission, gave a brief overview of the proposals submitted and explained that the purpose was to have preparatory activities in a manner, so that these reach a climax in the Commemorative year. Swami Prabhananda said that though India has made remarkable progress, it was necessary to impart 'value education' to the youth, so that they understand their responsibilities with a moral benchmark and imbibe spirit of national service.

5. Dr. Karan Singh, President, ICCR placed a paper on the proposals which the ICCR proposed to do. Dr. Singh suggested the organizing of a Mega conference in India and emphasized that most of the programmes should be in rural, tribal and poorer areas. Dr. Karan Singh also supported the proposal of a film on Swami Vivekananda proposed by Rajiv Mehrotra, which was included in the Agenda as Item No.4.

6. Shri B.P. Singh, Governor of Sikkim gave the following suggestions:-

- (i) A set of speeches of Swamiji be aired/telecast on the national media;
- (ii) Organisations should be identified all over the country to carry out the programmes;
- (iii) Suggestions and proposals should be invited from different people and organizations, through the media, as this will be the surest way of making people interested and aware of Swamiji's message and ideas; and
- (iv) Secretary (Culture) should be Member of the National Implementation Committee, which should be constituted to examine and approve the proposals.

7. Smt. Sushma Swaraj supported the proposals received and suggested that the youth should be involved in a big way, with the commemorative programmes like essay competitions and debates and that 'The Complete Works of Swamiji' should be given as prizes to the winners and also to the participants.

8. Shri Narendra Modi, Chief Minister of Gujarat, thanked the Government for including him in the National Committee and said that he had circulated a booklet containing his suggestions/proposals amongst the members. Shri Modi mentioned that:

- (i) The day is not far off, when stress management would become integral to every establishment and that yoga which addressed this problem in the best possible manner would be in great demand. As such, there was a

need to lay down standards in this regard and four Yoga Universities could be established in four corners of India;

- (ii) There is a need to produce a 'Vivek Vani' TV programme, to telecast Swamiji's message.
- (iii) The younger generation should be encouraged to adopt Service as the ideal, which Swamiji had termed as '*Daridra Narayan Sewa*'. In this connection, Shri Modi recalled the recent Gujarat experiment during the celebration of its 50 years of statehood, where youth were asked to donate hundred hours each for community programmes and an overwhelming response was received;
- (iv) We need to link the National Service Scheme with Swami Vivekananda's service ideas;
- (v) Swami Vivekananda's concern for the empowerment of women should be implemented through schemes in the most backward districts in the country.
- (vi) Since Swamiji started his 'Desh Bhraman' from Somnath, a memorial be set up at Somnath.

9.1 Shri Sitaram Yechury, MP, agreed with the suggestion that the National Implementation Committee should go through the proposals. He stated that Swamiji's lasting legacy was in the area of creation of an individual and a nation. Swamiji's legacy was for assimilation and not for destruction and he stood for plurality and tolerance. The celebrations should focus on the inclusive and syncretic nature of Swamiji's message, which respected all religions and denigrated none.

9.2 Shri Yechury observed that Ramakrishna Mission's proposal was very well-intentioned and supported it. He felt that by integrating modern technology, it intended to put across to the youth, the message of Swamiji, which was one of the major foundations of modern Indian approach. He also supported the character building of youth. The projects and programmes could, he felt, be decided by the National Implementation Committee.

10. Shri Ramesh Pokhriyal, Chief Minister of Uttarakhand said that Swamiji's message was relevant to today's India and thanked the Prime Minister for constituting the National Committee. He mentioned that through the Chicago Address, Swamiji put India before the world as a world guru. Swamiji's 'India Bhraman' and its goals were to counter disbelief in religion, inculcate '*atam gaurav*' and stress on the uniqueness of Indian culture. These need to be put up before the youth of the country again and that a 'Youth Yatra' needed to be organized, to rekindle these goals. Shri Pokhriyal recalled the love which Swamiji had for Uttarakhand and said that Swamiji had visited Uttarakhand four times; twice before his Chicago Address. The Mayawati Ashram was established in 1897 and Prabhud Bharat Patrika started by Swamiji is still being published from there. This publication could be made available in all schools and colleges and the Mayawati Ashram could be further developed as a resource centre on Swamiji. Shri Pokhriyal also suggested the starting of a Vivekananda Vithika at the Uday Shankar Academy in Almora. His other suggestions included, the construction of

a memorial at Kakri Ghat and the setting up of an International Dhayan and Yoga Kendra in Almora, where the Ramakrishna Mission has an establishment.

11. Smt. Girija Vyas, MP, Chairman, National Commission for Women suggested:
 - (i) Swami Vivekananda's teachings should find place in school and college education;
 - (ii) Chairs be set up dedicated to (a) Value Education; and (b) Comparative Religion;
 - (iii) Publication of Swamiji's letters which remained unpublished, especially on secularism. (Smt. Girija Vyas made special mention of those letters which Swamiji had written to one of his Muslim friends and suggested that the Ministry of HRD could publish it);
 - (iv) Special programmes for women empowerment in those States where Swamiji focused his activities;
 - (v) Ministry of I&B's active participation in propagating Swamiji's message;
 - (vi) Some programmes be held in Chicago, especially at the place where the famous Address was delivered and also where discussions took place;
 - (vii) Special efforts be made to motivate youth and other people in rural areas; and
 - (viii) Programmes could be taken to all those centres and universities where Indian philosophy was being taught.
12. Dr. Saumendranath Bera, MOS for Information & Cultural Affairs, West Bengal supported the programmes/projects suggested by the Ramakrishna Mission and informed the Committee that West Bengal Government had yet to finalize their programmes. These were likely to be submitted soon.
13. Dr. K. Ponmodi, Minister of Higher Education, Tamil Nadu, suggested (i) an Essay Competition for Youth, starting from the grass root level; and (ii) sponsored visits of youths to places associated with Swamiji.
14. Shri Mani Shankar Mukherjee suggested the following:-
 - (i) A logo for the commemorative event may be identified;
 - (ii) The possibility of reopening the Ramakrishna Mission's branch in Pakistan (which was earlier closed) be explored; and
 - (iii) The publication of good books by top authors, as they can do wonders, and also the distribution of Swamiji's message.
15. Shri Bharat Narah, Minister of Cultural Affairs, Assam said that his Government's suggestions had been submitted in writing.
16. Shri Aveek Sarkar, Chief Editor, Anand Bazar Patrika made the following points:-
 - (i) The proposed celebrations should not be of the past, but of India's future;

- (ii) Celebrations should not be elite-oriented, but should focus on common man and that the principal beneficiaries should be from below the poverty line; and
- (iii) Keeping in mind Richard Attenborough's excellent film on Gandhi, some distinguished film-maker from outside India could be approached to make a film on Swamiji, that could appeal to international audiences, in their idiom.

17. Shri Hira Singh Gabria, Minister of Cultural Affairs, Government of Punjab, thanked the Government of India for commemorating the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda and said that India was a country of saints. There were, however, problems which could be attributed to lack of teaching of patriotism in the schools and colleges. The mission of Swami Vivekananda was to abolish differences of caste and creed and work for progress of the country. Documentaries needed to be made and circulated to schools and colleges so that our youth would get Swami's message and become aware of Swami's contribution to nation building. Shri Gabria informed the Committee that the Chief Minister, Punjab had already sent messages to Vice Chancellors and Principals for organizing seminars, etc, so that the message of Swamiji reaches all sections of the society. Swamiji's ideals also needed to be put across through films, discussions and debates.

18. Prof. Mirinal Miri appreciated the good suggestions which had come from different members and suggested the following:-

- (i) One of the most important tasks was to try and bring Vivekananda's ideas to the people of the country, especially on his understanding of the dialogue, among religions by making these a part of on-going discourse on the wider issue of the role of religion as such;
- (ii) Swamiji's ideas would assist in understanding smaller and tribal religions and also the autonomy of these religions as also the conversation within these religions; and
- (iii) Stress be laid on Religion as transcendence, rather than as a phenomenon related to violence and disharmony;
- (iv) Focus on the essential secularity of religion, that Swamiji believed in.

Prof. Miri felt that the Ramakrishna Mission's proposals are laudable and needed to be taken further.

19.1 Prof. M.G.K. Menon said that the Ramakrishna Mission was founded by Swamiji himself and the proposal submitted by the Mission was very good. He fully supported it.

19.2 Prof. Menon stated that one could start from the bottom and move up in the Vivekananda campaign. He suggested the use of the electronic mode to approach the youth, which would facilitate in translating his ideas and will have a real impact, as also

be tangible. He also felt that it was necessary to have some commemorative programmes in Chicago, by establishing a Chair if necessary.

20. Prof. Lokesh Chandra mentioned that too many suggestions have been given and they now needed screening. He found films to be the most effective means for spreading Vivekananda's ideas and said that one should begin with this. He also suggested a beautiful publication of Romain Rolland's 'Life of Swami Vivekananda' and of 'the Collected Works of Swamiji', whose present printing quality was not good. The other suggestion was for publication of 200/250 page small book of memorable quotations of Swamiji, on relevant contemporary issues, which will also be meaningful to the younger generation.

21. Prof. Nawang Samten said that Swamiji was an icon who linked Indian culture with the future of India and world. A large number of problems could be solved, if Swamiji's ideas and values were accepted and put into practice. He also suggested dissemination through mobile exhibitions in those places that were beyond the city and towns, and also through a film by an Indian film-maker.

22. Dr. Satkari Mukhopadhyay advocated the translation of Swamiji's works in all languages of the 8th Schedule to the Constitution and selection from all works in major tribal languages. He also suggested that selections of Swami Vivekananda's writings could be done in Persian, as there was real interest in Iran, where Ramayana and Mahabharata translations had been published recently. He emphasized that the inter-religious dialogue and religious harmony that were prominent in Swamiji's ideas were the basis and common teaching of all the religions.

23. Shri Rudrangshu Mukherjee, Editor, Editorial Pages, the Telegraph suggested:

- (i) An endowment by Government of India for an Annual Lecture in Chicago, which should be by an eminent Indian or on Indic culture;
- (ii) Commissioning a proper biography on Swami Vivekananda by a well-known writer.

24. Swami Atmapriyananda recalled Swamiji's interest in establishing scientific institutions in India and said that it was Swamiji's discussion with Jamshedji Tata which resulted in establishment of the Indian Institute of Science. He suggested that we need to look into ways of encouraging / funding pure science education/research outside the Government. In Belur Math, there were a School of Mathematical Sciences and of Natural Sciences and these could be supported.

25. Secretary (Culture) thanked the members for supporting all the agenda items and also for giving so many suggestions, all of which would now be examined in terms of their operational details/ feasibility and resources available.

He mentioned that the Hon'ble Members had suggested roughly ten interventions for the commemoration, namely:

- (1) Involving the youth, through competitions, essays, discussions and study circles;
- (2) Publishing his complete works, abridged versions, biographies and others.
- (3) Emphasizing on Swamiji's ideals in schools and colleges, along with other suggestions to create 'Chairs' in Universities, Centres, etc.
- (4) International programmes, including conferences, lectures and seminars abroad and establish Chairs in overseas universities.
- (5) Focusing on Vivekananda and Yoga, to develop its proper understanding and establish standards for it, etc.
- (6) Utilizing the Electronic Media as the most popular medium for the propagation of the Swamiji's message, i.e. through the All India Radio, Television, CDs, DVDs, Internet, Website and films on Vivekananda.
- (7) Involving states and different organizations in commemorating Vivekananda's Travels throughout India, and to preserve some important heritage sites.
- (8) Encouraging research on religion and harmony, inter-faith dialogue and bringing his ideas into current discourse.
- (9) Commemorating his Chicago Address, perhaps through an Endowment for an Annual Lecture.
- (10) Creating a campaign through a catch word/phrase or logo, and inviting fresh ideas, through the press and competitions.

26. The National Committee was also informed of the need for an appropriate administrative structure, so that the programmes and projects approved by the National Committee and National Implementation Committee could be carried out properly. The National Committee took note of the issue and agreed with Ministry's requirement. The Chairman, National Implementation Committee may decide on the details.

27. The National Committee decided that a National Implementation Committee may be set up. The Committee took note of the proposals received from the Ramakrishna math and Ramakrishna Mission and others and the suggestions of all the Hon'ble Members of the Committee and decided that the National Implementation Committee may consider the suggestions, projects and programmes and approve the proposals selected based on merits and subject to the availability of financial resources. Regarding budgetary allocation, it was decided that the same would be looked into by the National Implementation Committee.

28. While concluding the National Committee Meeting, the Chairman announced that the National Implementation Committee would be set up under the Chairmanship of Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Finance Minister and thanked the members for their participation and suggestions.

The Meeting ended with a vote of thanks to the Chair.
