

## **VICE PRESIDENT CALLS FOR THE CREATION OF A CASTE-LESS, CLASS-LESS SOCIETY;**

Relevant for: null | Topic: Structure of Indian Society incl. Caste system

Vice President's Secretariat

**Vice President calls for the creation of a caste-less, class-less society;**

**The movement to dispel the caste system must come within the heart and mind of society: Vice President;**

**Asks religious leaders to work towards ending all kinds of discrimination**

**Calls for the creation of an egalitarian world with equal opportunities for all;**

**Our nation should be a safe space for diversity and dissent to thrive : VP**

**Never let the forces that divide us to be stronger than the forces that unite us: VP;**

**Pays tribute to Sree Narayana Guru**

**Inaugurates the 87th Sivagiri Pilgrimage Meet in Varkala, Kerala**

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The Vice President, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu today called for the creation of a caste-less society and said that the nation we aim to build must give equal opportunities to everyone to reach their full potential and lead fulfilling lives.

He was inaugurating the 87<sup>th</sup> Sivagiri Pilgrimage Meet at the Sivagiri Mutt in Varkala, Kerala today.

Shri Naidu asked all Gurus, Maulvis, Bishops and all other religious leaders to direct their efforts towards ending all manner of discrimination, especially in the name of caste. He also asked

religious leaders to spend more time in rural areas and villages and work for the upliftment of the depressed, suppressed and oppressed people drawing inspiration from great saints like Sree Narayana Guru.

Stating that the journey to Sivagiri Mutt, hallowed by the presence of Sree Narayana Guru, had been a deeply spiritual experience for him, the Vice President said that Sree Narayana Guru was a great saint, social reformer, philosopher and revolutionary humanist.

Quoting Guru's mantra of "Enlightenment through Education, Strength through Organization, Economic Independence through Industries", Shri Naidu said that Guru's teachings are of significant contemporary relevance, especially in the context of our efforts to promote social justice.

Shri Naidu said that the aim envisioned by Guru for the 'theerthadanam' or pilgrimage was the assimilation of wisdom, its practice in daily life and propagation.

Observing that Sree Narayana Guru respected and treated all religions equally, the Vice President said that Guru's advice to humanity was to always remember that '*In substance, all religions are the same*'. "He proclaimed that there was no distinction of Religion or God between human beings and called upon people to abstain from violence and religious conflicts to promote universal peace, harmony and prosperity", he added.

Underscoring that the Guru boldly rejected the caste system and all other divisive tendencies that turn people against each other, the Vice President said that Sree Narayana Guru brought back to the minds of the people the real message of "Advaita" which he formulated into a powerful practical philosophy of life as "One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man".

The Vice President said that India has been celebrated as the cradle of civilization, as the mother of culture and added that it had a glorious past during which its economy flourished, its society was enlightened, progressive and inclusive and its cultural ethos shone at its vibrant best.

Shri Naidu expressed concern that in spite of the significant progress on the economic and technological fronts, there were still pockets in the nation where social evils like caste discrimination persisted. "We must not doubt in our mind that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere", he said.

He stressed that it was time for us to retrospect and take pragmatic steps. "India of the future must be caste-less and class-less", he said.

The Vice President said that even though our constitution had already criminalized the abhorrent and inhuman practice of untouchability and the government has made several such laws, the implementation of these laws in letter and spirit depends a great deal on the mind-set of the society.

"The movement to dispel the caste system must come within the heart and mind of society. It must be an intellectual revolution, a compassionate revolution, a humanitarian revolution", he added.

He urged people to never let the forces that divide us to be stronger than the forces that unite us.

Observing that the Guru's approach to reform was through mental, emotional and spiritual

transformation and not through compulsion and coercion, The Vice President expressed hope that Guru's wisdom will continue to guide us in our efforts to build a strong, united, peaceful, harmonious society.

Shri Arif Mohammed Khan, Hon'ble Governor of Kerala, Shri V. Muraleedharan, Hon'ble Union Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Shri Kadakampally Surendran, Minister for Co-operation, Tourism and Dewaswom, Shri Oommen Chandy, former Chief Minister of Kerala and Member of Legislative Assembly of Kerala and others were present on the occasion.

**The following is the full text of the speech:**

"I am delighted to be here today with all of you on the auspicious occasion of the inauguration of the 87<sup>th</sup> Sivagiri Pilgrimage Meet at the sacred Sivagiri Mutt in Varkala in God's own country, Kerala.

Coming to Sivagiri Mutt, hallowed by the presence of Sree Narayana Guru has been a deeply spiritual experience for me. It gives me great joy to be here on this momentous day.

The year will soon come to a close and we all look forward to new beginnings.

I am sure that this unique pilgrimage will also be a new beginning in the lives of the pilgrims.

I am told that the idea for this pilgrimage or '*theerthadanam*' was crystallized in 1928. The Guru conceived the aim of the '*theerthadanam*' as the creation of comprehensive knowledge among people for their overall development and prosperity and suggested certain norms to be observed.

Every year, the pilgrims reach Sivagiri clad in yellow clothing, which is a symbol of their devotion, after following a brief ten-day austerity period based on Sree Buddha's five purities of Body, Word, Mind, Food and Deed.

The pilgrimage is for three days 30<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> December and 1<sup>st</sup> January every year and eight themes- **Education, Cleanliness, Piety, Organization, Agriculture, Trade & Commerce, Handicrafts & Science & Technology**, were chosen by Guru to be the focus of each pilgrimage meeting.

I am happy to know that, experts would be invited to give lectures on these themes at the pilgrimage meeting. It was the Guru's wish that the knowledge and wisdom that the pilgrims attained from these lectures and their experiences at the pilgrimage, must be practiced by them in their daily lives.

The Guru concluded that this assimilation of wisdom and its practice and propagation should be the main goal of this pilgrimage to Sivagiri, a lofty ideal indeed.

I am happy to learn that the first *Sivagiri Theerthadanam* was held on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1933.

It is truly noteworthy that several dignitaries, including Shri Narendra Modiji, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India had participated in various functions held here during the holy pilgrimage.

It is impressive that the number of participants has been increasing rapidly year after year. I am glad to learn that more than 30 lakh people from different walks of life, from all over the world, irrespective of Caste, Creed, Religion or Language would participate in this 87<sup>th</sup> pilgrimage festival.

The increasing number of pilgrims, year after year is a clear indication that Sivagiri has become the Supreme Centre of worship for the followers of Guru, the personification of the synthesis of all religions.

My dear sisters and brothers,

Sree Narayana Guru was a great saint, social reformer, philosopher and revolutionary humanist.

His life and teachings have crossed the borders of our country and have touched lives and inspired people all across the world.

His teachings are of significant contemporary relevance, especially in the context of our efforts to promote social justice.

Though Sree Narayana Guru was a Hindu by birth, he was not biased towards any religion. He respected and treated all religions equally.

He boldly rejected the caste system and all other divisive tendencies that turn people against each other.

Swamiji's advice to humanity was to always remember that ***'Insubstance, all religions are the same'***.

He also said ***"Man must progress whatever his religion. All human beings are born from a mother. Brahmin and Paraya both are born in the same way. Hence they belong to the same Jathi, Narajathi (humankind)."***

Guru convened the first religious parliament in Asia at Aluva Adwaitha Ashram on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1924 in which leaders of almost all religions took part.

Guru proclaimed that there was no distinction of Religion or God between human beings and called upon people to abstain from violence and religious conflicts to promote universal peace, harmony and prosperity.

Sree Narayana Guru brought back to the minds of the people the real message of "Advaitha" which he formulated into a powerful practical philosophy of life as ***"One Caste, One Religion, One God for Man"***.

He said, ***"Ask not, say not, think not caste"***.

He played a momentous role in the uplifting of the depressed classes of South India.

After the famous *Sivalinga Prathishtta* at Aruvippuram in 1888, Guru consecrated idols and founded many temples all over Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka but subsequently took up other campaigns to enlighten the people, giving the mantra ***"Enlightenment through Education, Strength through Organization, Economic Independence through Industries"***.

To unite the masses through organization and make them a self-confident and self-respecting community of people, he established Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam on May 15, 1903.

The Great Indian Poet Rabindranath Tagore paid a visit to Sivagiri in 1922 and had an hour-long meeting with Swamiji.

He wrote in the visitor's book, "I have been touring different parts of the world. During these travels, I have had the good fortune to come into contact with several saints and maharishis. But I have to frankly admit that I have never come across one who is spiritually greater than Swami Sree Narayana Guru of Malayalam, nay a person who is on a par with him in spiritual attainment. I am sure, I shall never forget that radiant face illumined by the self - effulgent light of divine glory and those Yogic eyes fixing their gaze on a far remote point in the distinct horizon".

Guru supported inter-caste marriages and inter-dining. He himself officiated several inter-caste marriages.

Mahatma Gandhi visited Sivagiri on March 12, 1925. After a day's stay in the Ashram, Gandhiji had discussions with Guru on several topics especially about *chaturvarnya* and the caste system in the form it existed in those days.

It is learned that this meeting with Guru had a considerable impact on Gandhi's future programs, mainly for the eradication of untouchability.

My dear sisters and brothers,

India has been celebrated as the cradle of civilization, as the mother of culture. It had a glorious past during which its economy flourished, its society was enlightened, progressive and inclusive and its cultural ethos shone at its vibrant best.

It was considered to be the capital of wisdom, the '*Viswaguru*' to the world.

It was home to celebrated scientists, doctors, scholars, philosophers, poets, teachers and dramatists. Women held a place of great esteem in society.

It was the leading light to the world in times of darkness and sorrow.

Though India has made significant strides of progress on the economic and technological front, I fear that there are pockets in the nation where social evils persist.

We live in times of turbulence.

Increasing cases of discrimination based on caste, community and gender are a cause for great concern.

We must not doubt in our mind that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

The caste system in our country is a vicious cycle.

Ram Manohar Lohya once commented, "Caste restricts opportunity. Restricted opportunity constricts ability. Constricted ability further restricts opportunity. Where caste prevails, opportunity and ability are restricted to ever-narrowing circles of the people".

It is time for us to retrospect and take pragmatic steps.

India of the future must be caste-less and class-less.

The nation we aim to build must have a place for everyone to reach their full potential and lead fulfilling lives by providing equal opportunities to one and all.

Our constitution has already criminalized the abhorrent and inhuman practice of untouchability.

The government can make laws. The implementation of these laws in letter and spirit depends a great deal on the mind-set of the society.

The movement to dispel the caste system must come within the heart and mind of society.

It must be an intellectual revolution, a compassionate revolution, a humanitarian revolution.

Our nation should be a safe space for diversity and dissent to thrive in.

We must dispel the notion of the 'other', the wrong belief that someone different from you in any manner is worthy of your contempt.

We are all one.

There is a strong thread of unity, that has endured the test of time that binds this diverse nation together in brotherhood. Every successive generation must aspire to make this thread stronger for this unity forms the very bedrock on which this nation was founded by our forefathers.

We must never let the forces that divide us to be stronger than the forces that unite us.

I note with growing apprehension that there is also perceptible degradation in the moral values of the society we live in. We must bring our nation back on the path of moral righteousness.

Today, we need the Guru and his teachings more than ever.

His approach to reform was through mental, emotional and spiritual transformation and not through compulsion and coercion.

He believed that where there is not this turning of heart and mind, all other things are likely to be superficial.

We need this transformation today.

I am hopeful that this pilgrimage that was envisioned by the saintly architect of renaissance, Sree Narayana Guru will initiate such a transformation.

I am confident that this wisdom will continue to offer profound guidance to seekers from all religious and cultural backgrounds and will contribute greatly to the building of a strong, united, peaceful, harmonious society.

We must remember to practice and protect our culture and feel proud of the same and continue to draw inspiration from the great saints, reformers and move on to once again attain the glory of being an ideal civilisation.

I extend my best wishes to the organizers of the festival and the pilgrims.

May the spirit of the great Guru continue guiding us to virtue and righteousness.

Thank You

Jai Hind!"

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VRRK/MS/MSY/RK

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