

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA WAS AN EMBODIMENT OF HINDU CULTURE: VICE PRESIDENT

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Vice President's Secretariat

Swami Vivekananda was an embodiment of Hindu Culture: Vice President

Indian culture is eternally relevant, timeless and time tested;

India believes not only in universal toleration but we accept all religions as true;

Preserving the invaluable heritage of India is true nationalism;

In a world of unprecedented changes, India can provide a sheet anchor and a spiritual compass;

In a world that is filled with bitterness, India could provide honey of wisdom gathered from different flowers by different bees;

The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women;

Addresses valedictory session of the 2nd World Hindu Conference 2018 in commemoration of 125th year of Swami Vivekananda's address

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The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that Swami Vivekananda was an embodiment of Hindu Culture and his messages that are relevant till today reverberate across India. He was addressing the valedictory

session of the 2nd World Hindu Conference 2018, in Chicago, USA today, in commemoration of 125th year of Swami Vivekananda's address at Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893 held in Chicago.

The Vice President said that preserving the invaluable heritage of India is true nationalism and said that with its knowledge and wisdom India could provide honey of wisdom in the bitter world.

The Vice President said that the extraordinary vision of ancient India encapsulates a message that is timeless and eternally relevant because it is holistic, integrated and universal. Whenever the world is faced with the threats of fragmentation, conflict, hatred and irrational prejudices, the Indian voice brings to the world the soothing, inclusive perspectives that have pervaded its cultural world for more than two millennia, he added.

The Vice President said that the Parliament of the World's Religions emerged as a celebration of the rich diversity in religious and cultural beliefs around the world and brought the world together to understand different world views. He further said that it deepened our appreciation of the common quest for peace and harmony that human beings have been engaged in from time immemorial. Swami Vivekananda's addresses at this Parliament have had an incredibly influential, he added.

The Vice President said that the unequivocal messages of tolerance, acceptance, unity and plurality of love, compassion, service, charity, gender equality, poverty alleviation and protection of the environment that exponents like Swami Vivekananda had spread across the world embody timeless values that are more relevant today than ever before. We should ensure that these values are further reinforced through behavior and action, as Swamiji said, by 'being' and 'becoming', he added.

Saying that India is also moving on an ambitious reform agenda that seeks to transform people's lives, the Vice President said that at this juncture, the values we all cherish, as Indians, can be the guideposts for our individual growth and collective advancement.

We have inherited a treasure house of ideas, values and attitudes. In a world of unprecedented changes, we need a sheet anchor and a spiritual compass. India could offer those to the world. In a world that is filled with bitterness, India could provide the honey of wisdom gathered from different flowers by different bees.

The Vice President held a bilateral meeting with the Vice President of Surinam, Mr. Adhin Ashwin on the sidelines of the World Hindu Congress and discussed issues of mutual interest. The Congressmen Mr. Mr. Bill Foster and Mr. Peter Roskam called on the Vice President and shared their appreciation of the progress in Indo-US relationship as well as the common understanding on many issues of contemporary relevance.

Twelve CEOs of various companies in Chicago met the Vice President and shared their experiences. The Vice President gave an overview of the policies and

administrative reforms in India, especially those facilitating ease of doing business.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

"I am pleased to be here with all of you at this valedictory session of the second World Hindu Conference. I am very happy that all of you have travelled from different parts of the world from Suriname to Fiji, from Mauritius to Thailand to commemorate the 125th year of Swami Vivekananda's address in this city.

It was, indeed, a unique event in modern world history that is worth commemorating. It is a moment that is worth celebrating. Not once but many times over.

Organized as a part of the celebration of the voyages of Christopher Columbus around the world, the World's Parliament of Religions emerged as a celebration of the rich diversity in religious and cultural beliefs around the world.

It brought the world together to understand different world views. It deepened our appreciation of the common quest for peace and harmony that human beings have been engaged in from time immemorial. Swami Vivekananda's addresses at this Parliament have had an incredibly influential. As Dr. J.H. Barrows, Chairman of the General Committee of the Parliament of Religions said, "Swami Vivekananda exercised a wonderful influence over his audience". Mr. Merwin-Marie Snell, President of the Scientific section of the Parliament, said that Swami Vivekananda was "beyond question the most popular and influential man in the Parliament". The grand vision of Indian thinkers found the most eloquent and sublime expression in Swami Vivekananda's exposition. While the main exposition was showcasing the discover new lands, the Swami's exposition showcased the discovery of spiritual well springs that have sustained the world over many centuries.

We, in India, feel proud that such a voice that stirred the hearts and minds of the delegates in the conference 125 years ago, still reverberates and strikes a deep resonance in many people across the globe. It does so, in my view because of the extraordinary vision of ancient India that encapsulates a message that seems timeless. It is timeless and eternally relevant because it is holistic, integrated and universal.

It is said of the great Indian epic Ramayana that "as long as mountains stand on this earth and the rivers flow, the story of Ramayana shall continue to be popular". What is true of the Ramayana is true of the entire treasure house of knowledge that India has given to the world.

Whenever the world is faced with the threats of fragmentation, conflict, hatred and irrational prejudices, the Indian voice brings to the world the soothing, inclusive perspectives that have pervaded its cultural world for more than two millennia.

As Swami Vivekananda said in his inaugural speech at Chicago on September 11, 1893, ours is a country that has “taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance.” India believes “not only in universal toleration but we accept all religions as true.”

Sisters and brothers from around the world,

We have come here to celebrate an event. We have come here to celebrate the remarkable exposition of important facets of the Indian world view. We have had an opportunity to listen to eminent personalities who have dedicated their lives to spread this message. As we come to the conclusion of this three-day conference, I would like to suggest some important aspects of our shared cultural heritage that were articulated so elegantly and emphatically by the great sage of modern India, Swami Vivekananda in his Chicago addresses.

This event is called the World Hindu Congress. But, what exactly is Hinduism? As Dr. Radhakrishnan observed, “we find it difficult, if not impossible, to define Hindu religion or even adequately describe it. Unlike other religions in the world, the Hindu religion does not claim any prophet; it does not worship any one God; it does not subscribe to any one dogma; it does not believe in any one philosophic concept; it does not follow any one set of religious rites or performances; in fact, it does not appear to satisfy the narrow traditional features of any religion or creed. It may broadly be described as a way of life and nothing more.”

The question is: what are the essential elements or facets of this “way of life”? Let me outline a few important ones.

First and foremost is the breadth of our vision. For the Hindus, the whole world is a family. The following verse from the Hitopadesha provides that enlarged, enlightened, all encompassing view.

“Ayam nijah paroveti ganana Laghuchetasam, Udaara Purushaanam tu vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” (To consider some of our fellow beings as our own and others as not our own reflects a poor understanding. In contrast, the enlightened persons see the the entire world as one family).

This view emanates from second key principle in Indian thought: World as a manifestation of the divine. The whole world including all the animate and inanimate objects are composed of the same elements and have the same divine energy within them.

The first name out of the thousand names of Lord Vishnu in Vishnu Sahasranamam is “Viswam” (The world). The Hindus believe that the entire universe is a manifestation of God. God lives in each living and non-living entity in this world.

As the Ishavasya Upanishad says, “Ishavasyam idam sarvam, yat kinchit Jagtyam jagat, tena tyaktena bhunjithah maa grudhah kasya svidh dhanam” (The divine principle pervades every atom in this universe. So, enjoy the bliss of being a part of

this universe and share the joy of living on this bountiful, beautiful earth with all your fellow beings and other objects without excessive greed and avarice).

When we see the world in this light, we cannot have a world which is fragmented or broken into “narrow domestic walls” as Gurudev Rabindranath had said.

We see everything and every person as divine, to be respected and treated as equal. Democracy and egalitarianism come naturally as corollaries to this world view.

This world view makes us care for our fellow beings and their needs. We also care for the preservation of natural resources and environment. We will create a more sustainable planet. The echoes of this principle are unmistakable in Mahatma Gandhi’s statement that “Nature has enough to meet man’s need but not for his greed”.

The third aspect is tolerance and acceptance of plurality. The Vedic sages had recognized that there are multiple perspectives on many issues. There was therefore no dogma and a singular path. The Rig Veda succinctly states, “Ekam sat, viprah bahudha vadanti” (The truth is one, the wise men describe it in different ways). As Swami Vivekananda says, “From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in Hindu’s religion.”

The fourth aspect is the realization that there is unity in diversity. Swami Vivekananda, in his address, refers to it quite explicitly when he says, “Unity in variety is the plan of nature, and the Hindu has recognized it”. Swami Vivekananda’s exquisite description is worth recalling. He said, “We Hindus accept every religion, praying in the mosque of the Mohammedans, worshipping before the fire of the Zoroastrians, and kneeling before the cross of the Christians, knowing that all the religions from the lowest fetishism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realize the infinite, each determined by the conditions of its birth and association, and each of them making a stage of progress. We gather all these flowers and bind them with the twine of love, making a wonderful bouquet of worship”.

The fifth important aspect is the ability to absorb and adapt. Saints and religious reformers like Buddha, Mahavir, Basava, Dhyaneswar and Tukaram, Guru Nanak, Dayanand Saraswati and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu have constantly made Hinduism a dynamic religion with the capability to reform, refine, reinvent its practices.

Sisters and brothers,

I have pointed out some salient aspects of the Hindu world view that Swami Vivekananda had brilliantly elaborated not only in his Chicago addresses but also in his lectures in India and abroad. Swamiji, in one of his lectures, says, “Love and charity for the whole human race, that is the test of true religiousness. Religion is realization; not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging.”

Swami Vivekananda had also focused on possible ways in which India should build on the spiritual strength. It is good to recall what he had said. He was convinced that “the best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women.” He also prioritized “first bread and then religion” and felt that “No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well educated, well fed, and well cared for.”

I think Hinduism’s unequivocal messages of tolerance, acceptance, unity and plurality of love, compassion, service, charity, gender equality, poverty alleviation and protection of the environment that exponents like Swami Vivekananda had spread across the world embody timeless values that are more relevant today than ever before.

We should ensure that these values are further reinforced through behavior and action, as Swamiji said, by ‘being’ and ‘becoming’.

The organizers of this conference have chosen a good motto “Sumantrite suvikrante” that could provide a good way forward.

This is taken from the Chapter 3 of Mahabharata in which Yudhishtira tells Bheema

“Sumantrite suvikrante sukrute suvicharite

Siddhyantyarthaah mahabaho daivam chatra pradakshinam”

(Whatever task is carried out after wide consultation and careful consideration, with the required competence will achieve the desired outcomes. Gods also will be pleased with this kind of work)

Sisters and brothers,

Hinduism provides a practical and seamless continuum between the inner spiritual world and the outer materialistic world, thus, bringing great harmony between our day-to-day existence and the existential questions we face as modern societies.

The world has embarked on an ambitious and transformative agenda focused on ‘people’, ‘prosperity’, ‘planet’, ‘peace’ and ‘partnership’. The sustainable development agenda accepted by all the countries around the world is to “foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.”

India is also moving on an ambitious reform agenda that seeks to transform people’s lives.

At this juncture, the values we all cherish, as Indians, can be the guideposts for our individual growth and collective advancement.

Let me recall what Max Muller, the great Indologist had said: “If I were asked under

what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered over the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied [Plato](#) and [Kant](#), I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of the Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw the corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human a life... again I should point to India.”

We have inherited a treasure house of ideas, values and attitudes. In a world of unprecedented changes, we need a sheet anchor and a spiritual compass. India could offer those to the world.

In a world that is filled with bitterness, India could provide the honey of wisdom gathered from different flowers by different bees.

As Swami Vivekananda had said about India: “Her influence has fallen upon the world like that of the gentle dew, unheard and scarcely marked, yet bringing into bloom the fairest flowers of the earth”.

I do hope the delegates from this conference will take inspiration from Swami Vivekananda’s speeches made in this country that shares with India a common commitment to core values and do their best to promote a more inclusive, harmonious world we all want. I hope the dew drops from our sacred clouds will make the flowers around the world bloom.

Let me conclude, as all Upanishads start and end, with a shanti mantra, a prayer for peace.

Om Bhadram Karnebhih Shrunuyaama Devaah |
Bhadram Pashyema-Akshabhir-Yajatraah |
Sthirair-Angaih-Tussttuvaamsas-Tanuubhih |
Vyashema Devahitam Yad-Aayuh |
Om Shantih, Shanthih, Shanthih

(May we hear good news, may we see good things, may we work together with devotion, steady mind and strong bodies and spend our lives in pursuit of goodness)

Jai Hind!"

BK

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