

*Swami Divyananda, Trustee, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, and Secretary, Sarada Pitha, Belur Math, inaugurated the 43<sup>rd</sup> Annual All India Youth Training Camp of the Mahamandal on 25 December 2009 at Basantapur, Sabong, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal. Here is what he said in the inaugural speech:*

This is a great privilege to participate in such a beautiful camp. It is an educational as well as training camp for so many youths of India. Swami Vivekananda was, as if, the embodiment of India. People say, he was *Bhāratātmā*, the soul of India. Swamiji dreamt of the future of the nation. Whenever he uttered, 'India' – the word with the five letters, it was full of love and emotion. We know, in his early youth, Swami Vivekananda wanted to be a traditional Yogi, to which his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna, objected. He said: I thought you would be like a great banyan tree, under which people will take shelter and have peace, but you are seeking your own liberation! So, Swamiji gave up all thoughts of personal liberation and gave us a clarion call: *Atmano mokshartham jagaddhitaya cha*. We are born to be free. Freedom is the eternal song of the soul, but it is not only our own freedom that we must seek. We are to strive for freedom of our countrymen from all sorts of suffering. Swamiji advised us to be true patriots, to feel for others, to feel for the country. After he passed away in 1902, one of his contemporaries, Brahmabandhav Upadhyay, remarked, 'I think of that pain and passion in Vivekananda, and ask, who is Vivekananda? Is it ever possible that passion for the motherland becomes embodied? If it is, then only one can understand Vivekananda.'

We know of a beautiful incident in the life of Swami Vivekananda. At that time he was in Calcutta at Balaram Bose's house. It was afternoon. Walking alone along the veranda, lost in deep thought, he was humming a beautiful *bhajan* of Mirabai: 'No one but the sufferer knows the pangs of sorrows.' Tears rolled down his cheeks, and with his face covered with his hands he said, 'Oh, nobody understands my sorrow! Nobody understands my sorrow!' Swamiji suffered and felt for the sufferings of millions of Indians. But, in 1897, when he returned from the West, he was asked by some youths of the country to give leadership and make the country free from the British rule. Swamiji said: Yes, I can lead you and free the country in no time, but where are the men who will maintain this freedom? So, first set aside all vein gods and goddesses and worship your motherland. Be man and try to make men. Then only India will rise and develop after independence.

In the Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, titled 'Learning: The Treasure within' (by Jacques Delors *et al.*), it has been said that education should have four pillars – learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be. The fourth pillar is the most important one. Vivekananda Yuva Mahamandal gives the maximum stress, maximum priority, on this pillar, because unless and until we become men, we cannot lead the nation, nor develop our country. We cannot remove our sufferings. Character only counts. The strength of character gives the maximum strength. Proper physical strength, mental strength, and spiritual strength come from character only. Character is nothing but the accumulation or integration of a number of good habits. If we practise good things, follow a good routine, and regulate our senses, if we control our desires for sense pleasure, anger, and greed, then only our character will be formed.

Swamiji did not preach any formal religion. He believed in being and becoming. Swamiji said in one place, 'What do I care if Mohammed was a good man, or Buddha? Does that altar my goodness or evil? Let us be good for our own sake on our own responsibility.' And he said, 'To be good and to do good – that is whole of religion.'

Swamiji lived in the mortal body only for 39 years. He represented the youth of India. At the age of 18 only he met Sri Ramakrishna and asked the greatest question of life: What is the truth? Can truth be realized in one life? If there is God, has anybody seen or realized God? Can anybody show me God? He went from door to door to meet great men of the then Calcutta. Nobody could assure him by giving a clear, affirmative answer, except Sri Ramakrishna, who told him: Yes, I have realized God as clearly as I see you. He is closer than you are. He resides in everybody. As it is said

in the *Upanishad – Ishāvāsymidam sarvam yat kincha jagatām jagat* – God pervades all the flux of the world, and

*Tvam stri tvam pumānāsi tvam kumāra uta vā kumāri*

*Tvam jirno dandena vanchasi tvam jāto bhavasi vishvatomukhah.*

– You are in the form of women and men, You are the boys and girls, You are the old, walking unsteadily with the aid of sticks. You are being born in all the various forms all over the world.

Whatever we see with our eyes is nothing but various forms of God. *Yatra jiva tatra Shiva.* We know the beautiful incident in his life at the age of 18 or so. He was inside the room of Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna was explaining the basic tenets of Vaishnavism. In course of that discussion, he was talking about three principles, one of which is to have mercy for living beings. While uttering the words, *Jive dayā*, Sri Ramakrishna went into Samadhi, the superconscious state of mind. In a half-conscious state he said, ‘Who are you to show mercy? Not mercy, but – *Shiva-jnāne jiva-sevā* – to serve the living beings, knowing that they are forms of God.’

The Upanishad says, ‘*Matridevo bhava. Pitridevo bhava. Acharyadevo bhava. Atithidevo bhava.*’ Swami Vivekananda added, ‘*Daridradevo bhava. Murkhadevo bhava.*’ – the poor, the illiterate – let these be your God. Our countrymen are our gods and goddesses. They are our own sisters and brothers. So this feeling of oneness of the nation Swamiji had, and he encouraged us to imbibe the same.

To apply these ideas of Vivekananda in the everyday life of all young men of India, the Vivekananda Yuva Mahamandal was established 43 years back and this is the 43<sup>rd</sup> National Camp. I attended many national camps, zonal camps, district camps, one day camps, and study circles organized by Vivekananda Yuva Mahamandal. Swami Vireshwaranandaji, the 10th President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, loved this organization very much. He was very eager to see this organization grow. He attended a national camp of the Mahamandal. Swami Bhuteshanandaji, our 12th President, also attended these camps. Swami Ranganathanandaji, our 13<sup>th</sup> President, also loved this organisation heartily. There were others like Swami Chidatmanandaji, Swami Smarananandaji (presently the Vice President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission), and Swami Jyotirupanandaji (Now in Moscow), who had been associated with the Mahamandal. Many monks in our organization, who heard the name of Swami Vivekananda through this type of camps, are still admirers of the Mahamandal.

Everybody need not or should not become monks. But we want men of character – Government staff, school teachers, doctors of strong character. Without character there would be no real development. What do we see even after 62 years of Independence? Our country has not developed. We still say it is an underdeveloped country. Some say, it is developing. Yes, it is developing materially. We have computers in villages, in rural schools also, but we lack teachers with character, doctors with character, on whom poor patients can rely. If they go to hospitals, they do not get proper treatment and respect. In many schools students are not given love and affection. How can a country develop, unless and until we have large number of good people, a large number of men of character? So, Swamiji said, ‘All the wealth of the world cannot help one little Indian village, if the people are not taught to help themselves.’ Even if the wealth of Kuvera is used to develop a village, the village will not develop, until and unless men are formed.

We are now 115 crores. Out of this 115 crores, 115 men of character are not available, who can lead the nation. The leaders of the nation will come from our youths only. We expect that out of them some will come up and give leadership to the country in a positive way. Swami Vivekananda did not criticize, but he wanted us to criticize ourselves. We should find out our errors and correct ourselves. Studying Vivekananda is a necessity. Today the Director of IIT, Kharagpur, Sri Damodar Acharya, met us. He invited us to come to his institute. There is a regular two hour class conducted by our monks of the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University at IIT, Kharagpur. Thousands of scholars, students, and teachers are attending the classes. At the Indian Institute of Management,

Joka, similar classes are going on. The Vivekananda Yuva Mahamandal is going in its own way throughout the country. They are conducting classes and study circles for youths. This is the only way to survive. We want that type of education, which will help us to know, to do, to be and to live together. Unrest, darkness, ignorance prevails everywhere. We are to bring light, and this light Swamiji has shown us through his own life.

We all know that at the age of 30 he went to Chicago to attend a religious conference. He went there to find a way for the development of our country. He had the desire to collect money in that country and form an organization of dedicated youths in India, who would lead and guide the youths of India. With this spirit he stayed abroad for about three and a half years. In the beginning of 1897, when he was 34, he came back to Calcutta. People received him with much enthusiasm. Among the youths of India from Colombo to Almora, there was a big commotion. They called meetings to give felicitation to Swami Vivekananda, and in his speeches in opened his heart to them. He said: India has a mission to accomplish, and India believes in the worship of humanity. India believes in man making and character building. India must live; otherwise the world will not survive. India has to give some great ideas and ideals to the world.

But after independence we have not listened to Swami Vivekananda. But I am hopeful, because a large number of youths are coming to attend such camps and the regular classes. I pray to Swami Vivekananda: May this number increase more and more; may the lives of people, of the youths especially, be built in the mould of Vivekananda. Vivekananda was a symbol of strength, a symbol of love. He used to say about his Gurudeva, Sri Ramakrishna: He is 'LOVE' personified. Three or four days before Sri Ramakrishna left his mortal body, he said, 'O Naren, today I have given you my all and have become a *Fakir*, a penniless beggar. By the force of the power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you.' So Swamiji also became a form of LOVE.

His life was one of ceaseless work for others and immeasurable renunciation. He never sought for his own comfort. On the very first day he became famous in America, he was given a very soft bed for the night at the house of a wealthy family. He could not sleep in that beautiful bed. He slept on the floor. He was restless throughout the night. 'O God, here these people spend so much in luxury, and in my country they cannot get a morsel of food! O God, O Mother, tell me the way to develop my country.' He was, as Brahmabandhav Upadhyay said of him, 'passion for the motherland' embodied. And we are the followers of Swami Vivekananda.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose came in touch with the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda when he was only 15. He was very much inspired by Swamiji's words: 'Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached.' 'If you think you are free, free you will be.' He wrote, wrote, 'If Swamiji would have been alive today, he would have been my Guru.' The messages of Swami Vivekananda inspired not only Netaji, but many freedom fighters. Before going to the gallows, they used to read *Vivek Vani*, as I have heard from some freedom fighters. Before they were hanged, they took bath in the morning, performed physical exercise, and read the *Srimad Bhagavad Gita* and Swami Vivekananda's words.

Romain Rolland asked Rabindra Nath Tagore, 'How do I know India well?' Tagore told him, 'If you want to know India, study Vivekananda. In him everything is positive, nothing negative.' For Swamiji says: 'You must remember that humanity travels not from error to truth, but from truth to truth; it may be, if you like it better, from lower truth to higher truth, but never from error to truth.' 'Ye divinities on earth – sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature.' 'The old religion said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself.' 'Each soul is potentially divine.'

Tinku Acharya had to his credit 150 patents in areas like computers, cell phone, colour Xerox, and so many things. But, in the past, he was in extreme poverty. When he was 11 or 12, his father became incapacitated. So, he had to do hard labour. He was a student of Class VI, when he started to work as a daily wage labourer. But he continued with his studies. He was asked to sit for the admission test at Belur College. He stood first. But he did not take admission to our college. One day

I saw him at G.T. Road. I asked, 'Tinku, why did you not join our college?' He said, 'Come to my house. Then you won't ask me again to study at your college. You would arrange for my boarding and lodging, but who would look after the five others of my family? Who would give them food and clothes?' I cannot still believe it! We know Vidyasagar lived in poverty. But compared to him, Tinku faced a worse situation and had to struggle more. He got admitted to Narasimha Dutta College, but could not attend classes. He had to work as a typist in two factories. Later he did M.Tech. and Ph.D. and established a modern research institute. So much power, so much intelligence, so much self-confidence he had! All these come from within. That is what Swami Vivekananda said to all of us: We have infinite energy, infinite strength, and infinite love. Everything is within us. We are to manifest it. That is called *ātma-vikās*.

I shall conclude with a story. A king had a beautiful garden, where there were many plants and trees. One day he went to each of them and asked, 'I spend so much money for you. What do you give in return?' He went to a mango tree and asked this question. A representative mango tree replied, 'O King! You have forgotten so soon! Very recently our branches were full of ripe mangoes. Your gardeners took away all those mangoes, which you and your family relished, and so many mangoes you sold in the market, and the money out of the sale was kept in your treasury.' 'Oh! Thank you.' Then he went to another species of fruit giving trees. They said the same thing in reply. Then he went to the banyan trees. They said, 'We have so many branches, where birds take shelter. We give shade to people and cattle for rest.' Then he went to the big grass. They said, 'We cannot give fruit or shelter or shade. But we give everything except our roots. The gardeners cut and take us wholly for providing food to the cattle.' Flowers also replied in a similar way. They have beautiful petals and colours and fragrance. 'We blossom for others' sake', they said. The king was charmed with the expression they used: *ātma-vikās*. The word, *ātma-vikās*, went into the heart of the king. The king was till then addicted to hunting and relaxing and enjoying. He now thought that God had given him also many virtues or powers. But he did not try to manifest them. He resolved to try to do it now. He changed the direction of his life.

This camp also will change the direction of the life of many boys. They will become new men. The aged and experienced men will show the boys the right ways for changing their lives. There are many men in the camp, who have been attending such camps for last 40/42 years. Now the second and third regeneration youths are coming to this camp. You will be associated with such an organization for long and will develop yourselves to be men and to be great.

I pray for all round development of the youths of India, who have assembled here and who are going to participate in the six day programme of the camp. I pray to Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swamiji for the development of this organization and for your all round development into proper manhood.