

Inaugural Speech at the 45th Annual All India Youth Training Camp of the Mahamandal on 25 December 2011

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I feel privileged to be with you this afternoon at the inauguration ceremony of the 45th Annual Camp of the Mahamandal. It is a pleasure to meet all of you here, with about 1600 young boys who have come from different parts of India. It is really inspiring that so many young men have come spontaneously. Not that anybody has invited you; all of you have come of your own, because you love Swami Vivekananda and are eager to carry his flag even to the last person in India and abroad.

As has already been announced, I have come down from the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas in Uttarakhand. This Ashrama was founded by Swami Vivekananda himself in 1899 with the help of Captain and Mrs. Saviour and Swami Swarupananda. From this centre, the basic books or the source literature of Swami Vivekananda are being printed and distributed in the whole world. Swami Vivekananda wanted that we should flood the whole world with Indian spiritual ideas, and that work is being done by this Advaita Ashrama. From this Ashrama, we are also bringing out one monthly magazine called *Prabuddha Bharata (Awakened India)*, which was started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896 in Chennai. Later on it was shifted to Mayavati, Himalyas. Through the pages of this magazine, the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and Vedanta literature has reached the hearts of millions of people around the earth. So, the contribution of this Ashrama to the annals of the Ramakrishna movement is immense. Whatever books you find in the market on Swami Vivekananda are all based on the books published by us long back on the dizzy heights of the Himalayas. This is a unique Ashrama. Standing in our monastery you can see a spectacular view of 400 kilometers of eternally capped ranges – Gangotry, Yamunotry, Kedarnath, Badrinath, Trishul, Nandadevi, Nandakot, Panchachulli, and other peaks of the Nepal region. It is simply breath-taking. Many people who admired Swami Vivekananda, like C. R. Das, the great Scientist Sir J. C. Bose, Sister Nivedita, Nandalal Basu from Shantiniketan, Miss Macleod, Sister Christine, and many others from different parts of the world came and stayed in this Ashrama. In its vicinity, in a radius of 40 kilometers, there is no human habitation. Our good neighbours are panthers, leopards, burking dears, porcupines, snakes, wild boars, and other animals. But, don't think I am an uncivilized man. Just I may be a forest dweller. Swami Vivekananda says, 'Civilisation is the manifestation of that divinity in man.' That is his central message.

All of us have assembled here to get a touch of the fire and flame of Swami Vivekananda. Now the question arises: Why Swami Vivekananda? Why not anybody else? Swami Vivekananda had a dynamic personality. He can become a role model for anybody, whether he is a child or an old man, whether he is a young man or a young woman. For

anybody he can become an ideal, a role model. That is why we adore him and read his literature. In my own case, whenever I feel any weakness or laziness, I simply look at the eyes of Swami Vivekananda and my weakness simply vanishes. ‘Onward and forward’ was his message. So, he was not static. Two pictures always come to my mind. One is that meditation posture. See how he is focused on one idea: he is totally immersed in his own divinity and identified with the whole universe. Then there is another photograph, which has been displayed here, and which has become a source of inspiration to millions of people: the wandering monk. He urges us to go forward. ‘Strength is life, weakness is death’, he said. He calls us, ‘Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.’ He had a tremendous personality, which we do not see in other people. That is why they do not fascinate us. Romain Rolland said that he was fascinated by his kingliness. He says, wherever Swamiji would go, people were bound to pay homage to him. Such kingliness was in him. Miss Macleod claimed she was a friend of Swami Vivekananda. She said, the one thing that she saw in Swami Vivekananda was his unlimitedness. He is so big, so vast! This aspect of his personality appealed to Miss Macleod. When he went to Trivandrum, he was carrying a letter introducing him to Prof. Sundararama Iyer. Afterwards, in one of his reminiscences, Prof. Sundaram Iyer says, ‘In my recollection of today, it seems to be somewhat of a nine days’ wonder; the impression is one which can never be effaced.’

Swami Vivekananda stayed for some time with the Leggetts in New York, who were very rich. Mr. Francis Leggett had a Secretary who used to call Swamiji ‘My Prince’ and Swamiji used to get embarrassed. He told him many times, ‘You see, we are wondering monks, we go from door to door and preach the spiritual ideas, and in turn we get some bread. So, don’t call me by this name.’ The Secretary told him, ‘Swami, whatever you tell me, I have gone to various places in this world and mixed and lived with great kings. I know how they talk, how they walk, how they sit, how they behave. All those traits are in you.’ Such was the personality of Swami Vivekananda.

He was a great spiritual teacher. Swami Swarupananda, who became the first President of Advaita Ashrama, came to Belur Math when Swami Vivekananda returned from the West and wanted to be initiated by him. Swamiji gave him initiation and *sannyasa*. He told somebody, ‘Today we have got an acquisition.’ He could see that this young man was able to work wonders. So, in Mayavati, while blessing Swami Swarupananda, he said, ‘*Swarup, jār māt̄hār upar āmi hāth rākhi, tār ihakāl-parakāler chintā korte habe nā.*’ – ‘If I keep my hand on someone’s head (as a mark of benediction), he will not have to worry about his destiny here or hereafter.’ He would be librated. Manmathanath Bhattacharya was a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. Once he told Swamiji, ‘Swamiji, if I am not able to pursue my spiritual life and I fall into the nether world, what will happen to me?’ Swamiji assured him, ‘You don’t have to worry. Wherever you may go, I will lift you up.’ So Swami Vivekananda was a truly spiritual leader.

Another disciple was Singaravelu Mudaliar. Swamiji used to call him Kidi. Swamiji had a specialty: he used to give a name to everybody. He used to call Akhandananda as Ganges, Mr. and Mrs. Hale as Father Pope and Mother Church. Even he called his Guru as ‘Buro’. He used to give names to all. Kidi used to come to Swamiji. He was a Professor in Madras College. He did not believe in God. He was a very rational person. He wanted to question to Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji warned him, ‘Don’t come forward. If you touch

me, your whole ideology will change.’ He took the challenge, he came near Swamiji, touched him, and his whole mental makeup was changed. Then Swamiji remarked, ‘Caesar said, “I came, I saw, I conquered.” But Kidi came, he saw, and he was conquered!’

Martin Luther King, Jr. was a great black leader and exerted a lot of influence in American history. He says: Millions of armies have walked on the surface of this earth, so many navies have sailed in the ocean, so many kings have ruled in this beautiful earth, and so many Parliaments have passed so many rules and regulations, but their influence has not been so much as has been exerted by these divine personages, like Jesus Christ, Buddha, Ramakrishna, and Vivekananda. Even after two thousand five hundred years we are not able to say whether Buddha was actually born in Lumbini or in Kapilavastu. It was after nearly three hundred years that Emperor Ashoka by the power of his sword declared that Lumbini was the place of his birth. But you see, within a few centuries the influence of Buddhism extended right from Afghanistan down up to Indonesia. How did this religion spread everywhere? Now Buddhism, the religion of peace, is the fastest growing religion in Europe and America. Nobody knows much about his life. But see how he is exerting his influence. We know about Jesus Christ through four small Gospels in the New Testament, and there also you find some contradictions. Some say, he was born in Bethlehem and some say, he was born in Nazareth. The Gregorian calendar that we see in every house is based on the birth of Jesus Christ. But even after two thousand years, we do not know when exactly he was born. In Jerusalem, Christmas is celebrated for one full month, because some people believe he was born on 24 December, some say, on 4 January, some say, on 12 January, and some say, he was born in April. What I mean to say is nobody knows about these personages precisely. They come silently, yet what tremendous spiritual energy they released on this earth. So many people are getting spiritual inspiration by thinking about them. They get new light, new inspiration.

Think of Napoleon Bonaparte, who became the Empire of France, ruled that country for ten years, during which period he fought seventeen battles. Ultimately, the British defeated him. He was exiled in Saint Helena, a small island. He was there for six years and ultimately he passed away there. One day he got a chance to think what had gone wrong with him. Afterwards he shared his sentiments with a friend, Count Marthelon. He told him, ‘My friend, just a few days back, I was just thinking what wrong happened with me. I came to the conclusion: four great men in Europe – myself, Napoleon Bonaparte, Charlemagne, Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great – all of us conquered the whole of Europe, but see the irony of fate! We lost during our lifetime itself. And now nobody wants to think about us. But I was thinking of Jesus Christ, who said about himself, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” See, even after two thousand years so many people shed tears when they think about him. They still get so much inspiration from him.’ Then Napoleon comes to the conclusion: ‘I have found that there are two powers in the world – one is the power of the Spirit and the other, the power of the Sword. That which is based on Spirit, on spirituality, on love and brotherhood, will alone last for eternity.’

That is why we find: though Swami Vivekananda left the world more than 100 years back, even now he is drawing so many youths. That proves that even now his power is

working. He himself said, 'It may be that I shall find it good to get outside my body, to cast it off like a worn out garment. But I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere, until the whole world shall know that it is one with God.' But, unfortunately, new age icons fascinate some of our young men, and these icons come from the film world or the sports world. But their effect is very short lived. They cannot inspire us for eternity. Have we ever heard that a billionaire like Bill Gates, Ambani, Birla or Tata – is being worshiped in a temple? Have you ever heard that a temple has come up memory of a great scientist like Einstein and that he is being worshiped there? No. Only those who were in rags are being worshiped, because they felt from their heart for others. That is why they became the source of inspiration for us. And that is why the role of Swami Vivekananda is so important for humanity.

Different people have different opinions about the significance of the life of Swami Vivekananda. You will find some of these in the columns of dailies, magazines, and research books. The authors quote from Swami Vivekananda's Works or the writings of his contemporaries. Some say, Vivekananda was a pioneer of India's independence movement. Some say, he was the champion of the poor. He was a 'Cyclonic Monk', says Annie Besant. His own brother, Bhupendranath Dutta says, he was a 'Patriot Prophet'. William James calls him 'the Paragon of Vedanta missionaries'. Some say, he was a scientist; some others would say, he was a great *yogi* or an educationist. So many people say so many things about him. When we read them, we are simply seized. We think, maybe they are right. They may indeed be right in some ways. But don't come to any conclusion readily.

We hear another voice: a very soft voice, but there is immense power in it. It asks us not to judge Naren (Swami Vivekananda), for nobody can understand him properly. This is the voice of Sri Ramakrishna, his Guru, who alone knew him well. He was responsible for bringing Swami Vivekananda to this world, and he was always guided by the Divine Mother, Kali. So his words can never go wrong. He forbids others to judge Naren. He himself explains what he is. One day, when Swami Vivekananda came to him, he says to him, 'You are the ancient sage, Nara, an incarnation of Narayana. You have come to this world to relieve it of suffering.' On another occasion he said, 'In you there is *Shiva* and in me is *Shakti*. We are non-different. We may be two different bodies, but we have the same Soul, the same Spirit.' On yet another occasion he tried to make him understand their oneness by giving an example – when we put a stick in water, it looks as if it has been divided, which in reality is not true. If anybody made negative comments about Naren, Sri Ramakrishna used to get upset. To him it was *Shiva-nindā*. Bhavanath, another young devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, once told him, 'Sir, I could not even dream that Narendra could stoop so low! He is mixing with all sorts of people; he is taking all sorts of food.' Sri Ramakrishna warned him, 'Hush, you fool! The Mother has told me that it can never be so. I shan't be able to look at you if you speak to me like that again.'

One day Keshab Chandra Sen, Vijaykrishna Goswami, and other leaders of the Brahma Samaj came to Sri Ramakrishna. After they had left, Sri Ramakrishna told some devotees, 'Well, if Keshab is possessed of one sign of greatness which has made him famous, Naren has eighteen such signs. In Keshab and Vijay I saw the light of knowledge burning like

a candle - flame, but in Narendra it was like a blazing sun, dispelling the last vestige of ignorance and delusion.’ So, Sri Ramakrishna was afraid that he could create a new organization and a new movement, so much capacity he had. He had brought him for a special purpose.

So, if we rely on the words of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda was a great spiritual teacher, who had come to give us energy, to give us direction. He wanted that we should rebuild India. If we want to erect a building, we have to call an architect who knows everything about buildings; otherwise we cannot do anything. Similarly, if we want to rebuild India, we have to work according to the directions of Swami Vivekananda. He knew India’s five thousand years of civilization. He was himself ‘condensed India’. He was more sensitive than a seismograph – wherever people suffered, it reflected in his mind and he got disturbed. So many occasions were there, when we find him becoming very much restless.

As all of you have come for a six day programme, a training course, you should exchange notes with each other. You have to listen to what the speakers say, because they will touch different aspects of Swami Vivekananda’s life and message and how we can apply his teachings in everyday life. You have to carry his fire and flame to your places of work. Don’t go empty handed from here. You have to re-energize yourselves. When you return home, people should say, ‘Yes, something special is in him. He does not behave like ordinary persons. He is free from selfishness, he is eager to help others.’ Such a revolution must take place in you. Swami Vivekananda had great faith in our young people. ‘The world is burning with misery.’ Swamiji says, ‘Can you sleep?’ Swamiji himself could not sleep.

At this camp, try to re-discover Swami Vivekananda. It can be done on three levels. One is the literature on Swami Vivekananda. When you read it, you will get a new life. Your blood will start boiling. Read his biographies. His lectures and letters are there, which constitute about 40 and 14 per cent of his Complete Works. Because of the efforts of J.J. Goodwin, we could preserve the original lectures of Swami Vivekananda. What others said about Swami Vivekananda also account for 4 to 5 per cent. Some newspaper reports have also been put there. And Swami Vivekananda’s own writings are there. *Parivrājak*, *Prāchya O Pāshchātya*, *Bhāvbār Kathā* – these are his original writings in Bengali. We have to read these things carefully and ascertain for ourselves what Swami Vivekananda wanted of us and how we can apply his message in our day-to-day life. Of course, it is very difficult, because Swamiji himself said, ‘I have given them enough for fifteen hundred years!’ It will take some centuries for us to understand what he had given us and it will take some more centuries to translate them into action. He knew that. Anyway, we have to make some endeavour for capturing true Vivekananda for ourselves.

And second level is his work. Observe how the work has been initiated and how it is influencing people. Swamiji himself says, ‘The whole world will be deluged by a tidal wave (of spirituality).’ He could see it before his mind’s eye. During his life time itself his message began to spread everywhere. In his name so many institutions have come up. The Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, the Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, and then so many other organizations have come up. The Yuva Mahamandal is

disseminating the message of Swami Vivekananda among the youths for last forty five years. It is no mean achievement to keep an institution running for so many years. And you will be surprised to know that this Yuva Mahamandal had its birth in the Calcutta Branch of Advaita Ashrama. This movement is inspiring people, and we are getting letters and response from them. So this is one methodology, this is one yard stick to measure the impact of Swami Vivekananda. We find people are eager; they are hungry for his message. The work initiated by Swami Vivekananda in spreading in all quarters and is influencing other religious thoughts also. Now so many books are coming up everywhere on Swami Vivekananda.

Then the third thing is reflection. We have to reflect on the glory of Swami Vivekananda, who has come down to lift us. By reading his message we come to know about our own nature : I am *ātmā – nitya-shuddha-buddha-mukta-svabhāva*. In the word of Swami Vivekananda, ‘Ye divinities on earth... you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal.’ We have to meditate on these ideas and then only we will be able to do justice to Swami Vivekananda. We have to analyse whether we are able to purify ourselves by applying his ideas, whether we are doing our work with perfection or just like those people who are getting fat salaries, but are not working seriously, because devotion is not there, sense of commitment is not there. Those who work for Swamiji do it out of love for Swamiji, with a sense of commitment, and with joy, not to please anybody. This is something spontaneous. We have to see: had Swami Vivekananda been amongst us, had he been happy?

I only expect, during your stay of six days here, you will try to derive the maximum from the deliberations on the ideas of Swami Vivekananda. Then try to convey that message to your friends, relatives, and others also. A great revolution should take place. You see the circumstances have become such that everybody is disgusted with the Government. Read Swami Vivekananda thoroughly and see what light he can give us and how we can guide the destiny of the millions of people in India. The whole world is looking towards us. They have got so much expectation from you. Rise to the occasion and see how you can meet their expectation. I pray to Sri Ramakrishna to give us strength, so that we can become useful citizens of India.