

# Moscow marks Swami Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary

April 18, 2013 Elena Krovvidi, RIR

Academics, Indologists and religious leaders speak of the relevance of the great Indian sage's teachings in modern day Russia.



India's Ambassador to Russia Ajai Malhotra dwelt upon the contributions made by Swami Vivekananda. Source: Embassy of India in Moscow

This week, the Jawaharlal Nehru Cultural Centre at the Indian Embassy in Moscow, the Ramakrishna Society – Vedanta Centre and the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, jointly commemorated the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

In his opening remarks, India's Ambassador to Russia Ajai Malhotra dwelt upon the contributions made by Swami Vivekananda, one of the most influential spiritual leaders of the 19<sup>th</sup> / 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The sage was a social reformer and a great scholar whose teachings influenced many across the globe and continued to do so even today. The Indian ambassador highlighted the message propagated by Swami Vivekananda that "service to God can be rendered by service to mankind." Other prominent speakers on the occasion were Swami Jyotirupananda, Rostislav Rybakov and Mark Mokulsky who highlighted various aspects of the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda and their enduring contemporary relevance.

The Labour Valour Fund honoured Professor Rybakov and Swami Jyotirupananda with awards on the occasion.

Swami Jyotirupananda, president of the Ramakrishna Mission in Moscow, was the first speaker. He emphasised Vivekananda's role as a fighter for the rights of the suppressed members of society in India. Jyotirupananda reminded that in India that April 15 - the birth anniversary of Swami

Vivekananda – is celebrated not only by holding lectures and functions but also by holding charitable activities. During the 4 years from 2010 to 2014, special attention is devoted in India to helping women and children, as well as other members of society who are in need of support. Within the framework of the programme, children from poor families and orphans are fed, tended to by the doctors and given primary education. Another part of the action is the support of mothers. There is also a moving exhibition of Vivekananda in train which travels from state to state.



Source: Embassy of India in Moscow

Jyotirupananda reminded the audience that Swami Vivekananda was the first person to suggest spreading the great Vedic wisdom across the world. “Scientists say that a human being is an economical and biological creature,” he said. “But this is not the whole truth. The wise philosophers even before Ramakrishna and Vivekananda spoke against it. The scientists say that they acknowledge the consciousness but they don’t understand its nature.”

Mark Mokulsky, Prof. and Dr. of physical and mathematical sciences at the Institute of Molecular Genetics, Russian Academy of Sciences, followed the discussion about Vivekananda by sharing his hypothesis on the connection between spirituality of Vedanta and genetic-molecular science. Mokulsky is very much interested in the in-depth interpretation of ancient religions. He spoke about a number of signs forming human genetic code and the mysteries ciphered in the ancient Vedic scriptures.



Another eminent speaker Rostislav Rybakov, Indologist, Dr. of historical sciences and Director of the *Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences* in 1994-2009, elaborated about the relevance of Vivekananda’s teachings to the issues Russia has to face in our day. Rybakov

maintains that Vivekananda's philosophy is very much on the agenda for Russia and Russians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

He called Vivekananda a man that came from the future to teach people the great wisdom, and people are very slowly and gradually moving towards the understanding of his ideas.

Recalling the recent Day of Cosmonautics in Russia, Rybakov also quoted the legendary Yuri Gagarin who said: "India looks like a big human heart from the space." According to Rybakov, such an observation coming from the first cosmonaut shows that India represents the centre of spirituality for the world even at the sceptical epoch of scientific and technological progress.

Professor Rybakov believes that in the past Russia, which had a lot of things in common with India, has lost its traditional values. "Disrespect is one of the toughest issues that Russians have to fight today," he says. "All kinds of disrespect. Disrespect towards people, towards history, towards law, and, finally, towards ourselves."



Source: Embassy of India in Moscow

Among the big problems of contemporary Russia, Rybakov singles out a lack of education, and, what he considers even worse, poor education; when a person has heard a little on every subject but doesn't have profound knowledge on anything. This idea is intertwined with what Alexander Pushkin said in his famous work Evgeny Onegin about Russia's high society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: "We all meandered through our schooling haphazard; so, to God be thanks, it's easy, without too much fooling, to pass for cultured in our ranks."

Rybakov believes that the only path to follow is to educate children from the youngest age, but not simply educating but imbining them with moral and ethical values that will lay the foundation for their future view of the world. "The way that we need to go is lengthy, torturous and complex," Rybakov says. But it is the only possible way."

The finishing stroke of Rybakov's speech was drowned in enthusiastic applause: "Recently, the French actor Gerard Depardieu has become an honourable citizen of Russia. But, in my view, Swami Vivekananda should become an honourable citizen of Russia, even after his death. We need him very much in our lives today."

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