

## **150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda in France: A Report**

The 14<sup>th</sup> District of France is known for its tradition of providing temporary residential facilities to great men and women all over the world for centuries including Mahatma Gandhi, Thomas Paine, Rosa Luxemburg and others fleeing prosecutions in their lands.

**Swami Vivekananda** came to Paris being invited to the Congress of the History of Religions in Sorbonne within the framework of the Universal Exhibition in 1900. He stayed at 23 Rue Gazan which was renumbered to 39 in 1904. The apartment was owned by writer-journalist Jules Bois. He was impressed by the hospitality of the people and he wrote: “Paris is the new home of freedom; it has infused a new life in Europe”.

Soon, the statement became more relevant with the arrival of the likes of Trotski, Lenin, painters Pablo Picasso, Modigliani, Marc Chagall, Salvador Dali, litterateur Vladimir Maïakowski, Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco and others.

The District has a Citizens’ Council for the Non EU Nationals called “Conseil des citoyens parisiens extra communautaires”. Impressed by the universal approach of Swami Vivekananda, the Deputy Mayor in charge of the movement against exclusion and discrimination Paul Roussier approved of organizing an exhibition and meeting to pay homage to the former famous residents of the 14<sup>th</sup> District including Swami Vivekananda with the initiative of the above Council.

On 13 October 2011, in presence of other dignitaries, the meeting was inaugurated by Mayor Paul Cherki at 7.30 PM. The Deputy Mayor of the 14th District Paul Roussier spoke about the opportunity he had, to know about Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission which motivated him to organize the event.

The first part of the rest of the meeting was on Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Veetamohananda, the minister in charge of the Vedanta Centre of France, in his speech emphasized on the spirit of universalism, the recognition of the importance of material well-being with the dominance of spiritualism, the four paths of achieving divinity for which every human being has the potential and the union of science and religion, the messages Swami Vivekananda propagated.

Doctor Prithwindra Mukherjee spoke about the inspiration Vivekananda provided to the freedom movement of the country through patriotism and social service.

The part on Swami Vivekananda ended with two songs on Swami Vivekananda.

To commemorate Swamiji’s stay at Paris, the Council has also planned to put a “plaque” on the façade of the building where he stayed.

*Thus France becomes the second country after India to start the ceremonies to commemorate the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. A series of events will follow, with the plaque in 2012 and culminating in 2013 with ceremonies all over France.*